THE SECOND DAY.

Tuesday, the 22nd February, 1927.

The Assembly met again at 11-30 A. M. on Tuesday, the 22nd February, 1927, and the consideration of the subjects, according to the list distributed among the members on the previous day, was taken up.

1. Establishment of a Road Fund in Travancore.

MR. A. J. WRIGHT (*Member, Kannan Devan Planters' Association*) said that a considerable and increasing amount of attention was being devoted to the problem of transport throughout India and that, in this matter, Travancore had participated fully. The movement was becoming focussed gradually upon motor transport and the provision of a system of roads suitable to modern development and permitting the fullest utilisation of the advantages available in that direction. The successful development of an agricultural country like Travancore depended upon the facility with which the produce thereof could be taken to the markets. The provision of harbours and railways would, in his view, fail in their object if the question of motor transport and the provision of adequate facilities for taking the fullest advantage thereof were neglected.

The experience gained in other countries had shown that the most successful solution of the transport problem was the Road Fund System adopted in Great Britain. The United Planters' Association of South India had, from their annual general meeting held in August 1926, sent up proposals to the Government of India through the Government of Madras, for the establishment of a Road Fund and the member took the opportunity to bring them to the notice of the Government of Travancore also. With the primary object of the improvement of roads and the development of road transport, "The Indian Road and Transport Development Association" had been inaugurated in Bombay within the past few weeks. The Council of State in Delhi had also adopted a resolution to constitute a committee to go into this question. The question of such development was admittedly one of funds; but the successful working of the scheme in Great Britain was a valuable help in meeting this question.

One of the greatest drawbacks to the successful development of motor transport was the system of tolls and the member therefore advocated their abolition, at least so far as mechanically propelled vehicles were concerned, if they could not be done away with entirely as in Great Britain. This proposal had the support of no less important a body than the Taxation Enquiry Committee which had recommended the abolition of tolls on motor vehicles. The system of levying tolls impeded rapid transport by the constant and irksome stoppage of the vehicles for payment of tolls. Although the system of levying tolls answered quite fairly well with the country cart, it was found to be quite unfair in its incidence when applied to modern transport facilities and to bear unfairly upon the transport of goods in large quantities and at greater speed. Instances were available where motor lorries were unable to compete with country carts through the excessive tolls levied on the former. Another disadvantage was that, under the existing system, the Government did not derive the fullest advantage from the tolls levied on traffic inasmuch as a portion of the tolls contributed to the private profits of the toll contractors.

As regards the substitution of other taxation, the member said that no one would appreciate fresh taxation; but no one would dispute the fairness of levying an adequate contribution from motor traffic for road maintenance, *provided* assurance was given that the tax collected would be devoted *entirely* to the purpose for which it was levied. The levy of a tax on motor and other mechanically propelled vehicles on the basis of the horse-power of the engine, and on the basis of weight in the case

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of commercial vehicles, had been adopted elsewhere. But, in the case of the former, the system had not proved entirely satisfactory and a large volume of well-informed opinion was in favour of the substitution of a tax based on petrol consumption. One of the many advantages of his proposal was that it responded at once to the amount of use made of the vehicle, its power and load, whereas the former method taxed the vehicle irrespective of whether it was used occasionally or constantly. The tax levied in Great Britain was £. 1 per horse-power. Taking the road tolls in Travancore at an amount between nine pies to one anna a mile, a twenty horse-power car would pay approximately the same sum on about 250 miles of running a month.

In conclusion, the member said that his Association and himself hoped the Government would take early steps for investigating the matter.

DEWAN'S REPLY: Mr. Wright, I have listened to what you have said with considerable interest and this is not the first time that the idea of an arrangement, for making motor traffic easier and cheaper has been brought before the attention of the Government. You will find that the total amount contributed by motor vehicles towards the maintenance of roads by the medium of toll-gates in Travancore is roughly Rs. 1,80,000 a year. The Government on the other hand, spend, as you would have seen from the *Administration Report*, something like Rs. 5,60,000 on the construction and special repairs of roads alone, apart from the maintenance charges which amount to about Rs. 7,00,000. Therefore, the total amount spent by the Government on roads amounts to about Rs. 12,60,000 for which the Government derive, from the traffic using these roads, the total revenue of about Rs. 2½ lakhs. You will, therefore, find that we spend more on roads proportionately than in most other parts of India ; and the total length of roads here, *viz.*, about 2,900 miles, is greater than in any other equal part of India. Therefore, I say, users of motor vehicles in Travancore get better roads and greater conveniences in that matter than elsewhere. Even in the matter of toll stations, they are much better off than their brethren across the border because we have toll-gates much farther apart than in other parts of India. You refer to motor vehicles being the most heavily taxed of the transport vehicles here. That may be. But let me assure you that we get no other tax from motors except by way of tolls, few and far between. Motor vehicles come in from outside and they pay import duties of 30 per cent. but that does not find a way into our pockets to any extent. Nor do we get anything on petrol.

You specially asked for a Road Fund to be established here. The success of a Road Fund depends entirely on the large number of vehicles that ply on the roads. I do not think the total number of vehicles plying on our roads is as yet sufficient to yield a fund which will amount even to a quarter of the present cost of maintenance of our roads. There are some 1,850 licensed motor vehicles only.

In regard to the question of imposing a duty on petrol, that will have to be the subject of negotiations with the Paramount Power. In the first place, if we are to impose any impost on petrol it will very possibly be over and above what it may have to pay in British India. In other words, the cost of petrol will be so heavily enhanced as to retard the extension of motor traffic. These are all matters that have to be considered carefully and in relation to various factors which cannot be brought under review at a moment's notice. All this will take time. Meanwhile I shall see whether it is possible to arrive at some general system of compounding toll-fees so as to save some inconvenience to the users of motor cars and other vehicles.

2. Hardships caused to the tenants on account of the payment, in kind, of Michavaram, Tiruppuvaram and Sripandaravaka tax and remedies therefor.

MR. S. PADMANABHA AIYAR (*Member, Neyyattinkara taluk, Group II*) said that the subject was not new but had been pressed at many prior sessions of the Assembly. As a result of such representations, the Government appointed a committee to enquire into the matter but the report of the committee was not accepted. In 1921, however, the Government introduced a bill in the Legislative Council to amend the Jenmi and Kudiyan Regulation of 1071, but the bill had not yet come up for consideration.

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